

## GALATIANS PART 15

GAL. 4.12-20

In the first 3½ chapters of Galatians, Paul has revealed his anger and frustration with the Galatian churches. He has strongly defended his own authority to preach and the accuracy of his message of the gospel of grace.

In chapters 3 & 4, Paul has gone to great lengths to make the case that God's plan of redemption for man has always depended on faith. Much of what we have studied over the past several weeks has been tedious and challenging.

Today, beginning in verse 12 of chapter 4, we witness a very distinct change in the tone of Paul's letter.

His emphasis in these next few verses...

- Not logic, but love
- Not principles, but people
- Not religion, but relationships

**Verse 12: “*Brothers, I entreat you...*”**

Earlier, Paul referred to his readers as “foolish Galatians.” Now, as in the beginning of the letter, Paul once again refers to them as “brethren.”

In these verses, Paul does not seek to make his case through arguing so much as by appealing to the love he has for the Galatians and the love that they once showed to him.

He appeals to the memories of past relationships to remind them of the bond of love that grew between them during his ministry among them.

***“...become as I am...”***

Paul was at one time among the most devout Jews in the world. He observed the Mosaic Law and traditions, kept the Passover in every detail, observed the feast days, and recognized that certain foods were ceremonially unclean.

But by the grace of God, Paul had been delivered from the Law. And while he lived among the Galatians, he lived as one freed from the Law.

If he who had given his whole life to the study of the Law could now lay it aside by the grace of God, then it would seem to be a simple task for those who were not steeped in the Law and traditions to follow his example.

If the Law had held any advantage...

- Justification
- Forgiveness
- Eternal life

Then certainly Paul would have been aware of it and would have urged the Galatian believers to accept it.

***“...for I also have become as you are...”***

Paul had not lived as a Jew among these non-Jewish Galatians, but had lived as they lived – not practicing idolatry and sinful practices – but not practicing the Jewish religion in front of them as if he were better than they.

1 Cor. 9.20-22

***You did me no wrong.***

This is a difficult phrase to interpret within the context. There is no general agreement on what Paul meant by this phrase.

Paul may have been telling the Galatians that their failure to follow through on their faith was not a personal offense to him. His anger, frustration, and perplexity were not a matter of personal injury.

Paul did not measure his success in ministry by the successes or failures of those to whom he ministered. After all, ministry was not about what he accomplished, but about what Christ accomplished through him.

I believe the phrase seems more understandable, though, if we attach it to the next verse instead of to verse 12.

Thus we hear Paul say, “When I first came to Galatia, you did me no wrong in spite of my condition. In fact, you treated me so much better than one might expect.”

### **Verses 13-14**

Paul reminds the Galatians that he came to them through the providence of God. Apparently too ill to travel any farther, Paul came to stay among the citizens of Antioch of Pisidia and to preach the gospel message there.

No one has ever been able to clearly define the illness that Paul suffered. There is much indication that it had something to do with his eyes.

Whatever the case may have been, the one thing that appears to be undeniable is that the sickness created some form of outward appearance that would normally cause a reaction of revulsion.

Yet the people of Galatia did not reject Paul. (The word here comes from a root word that means to spit – either to spit out or to spit up – thus giving us an idea of how repulsive Paul looked at the time.)

Instead of being repulsed, the people of Galatia opened their arms to Paul, treating him as an angel – or even better – as if he were Christ Jesus himself.

Now things had changed so drastically, that Paul was forced to ask...

### **Verse 15**

#### ***“What happened to this blessedness of yours?”***

What happened to the joy, the enthusiasm, the desire for fellowship, compassion, and care?

Of course, Paul knew the answer to this question.

- The Galatian people had allowed legalism to rob them of grace.
- Instead of living in spiritual prosperity they had settled for spiritual poverty.
- Tradition, ritual, and mechanical routine had taken the place of the simplicity of grace.

Later, in the Revelation, Jesus would say to the church at Ephesus...

Rev. 2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

This verse does not teach that a person can lose their salvation, but that a church can lose its voice in the community and its effective witness when it puts all its emphasis on programs and policies and forgets to honor Christ in all things.

#### ***“For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”***

There was a time when the people of Galatia so loved Paul that they would have given their own sight to have restored his – an indication that his illness was related somehow to his eyes.

Now look how radically things had changed.

**Verse 16**

The message that Paul preached when he first came to Galatia was so moving to the hearts of the people that they overlooked the repulsive nature of his illness. They loved the gospel so much that they were willing to sacrifice to continue to hear it.

Now, as Paul continued to teach them the truth, they rejected what he had to say to the point that those who were once friends and brothers in Christ had now become as enemies – all because of a conflict in doctrine that caused one party to separate themselves from the other.

Hospitality had now become hostility.

Where there was empathy now there are only enemies. Why?

Because the message the Galatians had chosen to hear was the wrong message. And the truth of the Scripture as taught by Paul was rejected out of hand.

**Verses 16-17**

Paul answered the question he asked in verse 16 with verse 17.

He knew what had happened.

Not only had these false teachers taught an incorrect message. They had also used an insincere method.

***“They are enthusiastic about you, but not for any good.”***

These false teachers demonstrate a great zeal for you. They are very enthusiastic in their efforts and in building relationships with you.

They smile and laugh with you, give you candy, and promise you a great time at the circus, when all the time the end result of their work will be death for you.

All of this because of an improper motive...

***“Instead, they want to isolate you so you will be enthusiastic about them.”***

In order to more readily affect your soul and to gain power over your thoughts, these false teachers seek to isolate you from the truth so that the lies they tell will be less apparent – so that the truth will not be available for comparison.

*The Message:* (v. 17) They want to shut you out of the free world of God's grace so that you will always depend on them for approval and direction, making them feel important.

**Verses 17-18**

Paul agrees that it is a good thing to be zealously sought after. All of us love it when we are the center of attention – when our needs become the priority of others – when those in authority (or those who claim to have authority) seem to have our own best interest at heart.

That's the same approach that Paul used toward the people of Galatia.

The difference is in the message and the motive:

- Paul's message – all about Christ and the truth of the Gospel of grace. Paul taught the Galatians because he wanted them to worship Christ.
- Judaizers – taught the untruth that there was life within the Law when they themselves knew that such a thing was not true.

Paul's motive was to lead them to please Christ, not men – to seek after Christ, not to attempt to prove themselves righteous before others.

Paul started churches and even revisited them for the purpose of discipleship.

But when the time came, he left them to grow on their own so that they would have to depend on Christ and not on him.

So many churches today are built around personalities instead of the person of Christ.

Then, when that personality has a moral failure or leaves that church for another ministry, the church begins to struggle and to wonder how they are going to survive.

Immediately, they begin to look for another leader, not because they are so interested in growing in Christ, but because they need someone to do spiritual things for them and to continue to spoon feed them the easy-to-swallow meals of baby Christians.

Paul would have loved to have stayed with the Galatians, but then the work of the evangelist to which he was called would not have been done.

These Judaizers – these false teachers – were about the business of building themselves up so that they appeared greater in the eyes of the members of the churches of Galatia.

They knew that, if they were to be successful in teaching their doctrine, they would have to prevent the Galatians from hearing and adhering to the message of Paul.

When false teachers – and dishonest politicians, for that matter – seek to influence others with their own doctrine or philosophy, one of the primary means is separation.

And the separation does not have to be physical separation.

The false teacher simply puts the emphasis on differences...

- Skin color
- Cultural differences

- Unequally distributed wealth
- Historical struggles
- Class warfare
- Dress and music and the arts

The three steps are to successfully sinning the hearts and minds of the group you seek to influence are...

- Isolation – keep emphasizing the differences between your target group and everyone else
- Intimidation – turn those differences into fears that will cause your target group to turn to you for answers
- Indoctrination – tell them what they want to hear without ever telling them the real motive behind your actions

It is not a new method. In fact, Satan doesn't need a new method. He simply continues to recycle the same old temptations over and over and men continue to fall into the trap generation after generation.

Paul was very familiar with the tactic even in the first century.

### **Verses 19-20a**

Paul's appeal to the Galatians now becomes even more tender. He refers to the Galatians as "my little children" – the only time he would ever use this phrase.

It was the same phrase that Jesus used when he referred to His disciples in John 13.33.

Paul is not finished with his argument nor has he solved his own perplexity caused by the actions of the churches of Galatia.

In v. 21-31, Paul will make one more attempt through logic, reason, and history to convince the Galatians of how foolish they have been.

But for now, Paul's message is not about anger, but about anguish. It is not about authority, but about agony.

He speaks to the Galatians, not as a concerned yet severe father, but as a mother whose heart is shattered by the decisions of an undisciplined child.

His concern for the Galatians was as painful to his heart as labor pains to a woman giving birth. A mother is concerned that the child within her womb is forming correctly and will have all of its fingers and toes in place when born along with a strong heart and steady breath.

Paul is equally concerned about the spiritual formation of these his disciples – concerned that they have strayed so far from the truth that they may never be formed into the image of Christ.

Paul knew that, if he could just visit these churches of Galatia, possibly he could overcome this threat.

He knew that speaking a friendly word of truth in person was much more effective than speaking a harsh word from a distance.

Yet going to Galatia was impossible at the time, although we are not sure where Paul was when he wrote his letter.

Then, in the second half of verse 20 – almost as if he had quit in mid sentence – Paul writes...

***“I am perplexed about you.”***

Right about here, Paul seems to break away from the reverie and remembrance of what was and what could have been and returned to what is.

Once again, his distress and worry and perplexity over this situation come to the forefront.

That word that is translated “doubt” in the KJV is translated as perplexed in other translations. It means to be without resources,

not knowing which way to turn, unsure of what to do next, to be at a loss for words.

NLT: ...at this distance I don't know how else to help you.

NAS: ...I don't know what to do about you.

One thing we can see in this portion of Paul's letter.

While throughout the previous sections he has been caustic and cutting, in this section he is gentle and gracious. He is putting into practice what he would later write to his disciple, Timothy...

2 Tim. 2:24 ...the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

By being so, he has eased the way for repentance and a return to faith by the Galatians.